

News Items and Public Crime Summary for Week Ending April 3, 2010

Antilles – De Jongh-Elhage II Cabinet and New Parliament Sworn In

Last Friday, the new Antillean MPs and cabinet members of the Emily de Jongh-Elhage administration II were sworn in by Governor Frits Goedgedrag.

Goedgedrag referred to the moment as historical, because it is expected to be the last Central Government of the Netherlands Antilles. “The Netherlands Antilles is scheduled to dismantle on 10-10-10. Dismantling the Netherlands Antilles, creating the new constitutional entities, finalizing the legal framework, and above all serving the interests of the people of the islands are the primary goals of this administration,” Goedgedrag said. (Various media)

Kingdom – Verhagen: Venezuela Unwilling to Start Dialogue on USFOL

Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Verhagen informed Dutch parliament that Venezuelan authorities have not responded to Dutch attempts to start a dialogue regarding accusations by Venezuelan President Chavez. The Dutch government announced on several occasions it was ready to begin such a dialogue. Various calls by MFA Verhagen to his Venezuelan counterpart Maduro to organize high-level meetings were left unanswered. We are willing to talk to Venezuela about their U.S. Forward Operating Location concerns, but Caracas is unwilling to cooperate and is avoiding us, Verhagen said.

“The Netherlands embraces its friendship with the Kingdom’s largest neighbor. “We don’t need any escalation of conflict in the area,” Verhagen said during a debate in Dutch parliament on the topic.

Also, Minister Verhagen refuted the accusation that a U.S. FOL aircraft entered Venezuelan territory. The picture the Venezuelan government provided as evidence is very old and has been downloaded from the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, he argued. (Various media)

Kingdom - Bijleveld: No concrete indication for PdVSA-withdrawal’

Dutch State Secretary of Kingdom Relations Ank Bijleveld-Schouten said, in a reaction to questions asked in Dutch parliament, that there is no concrete indication that Venezuelan State-owned Oil Company PdVSA will unilaterally terminate the current Curacao Isla refinery lease. Dutch parliamentarians raised their concern after Venezuelan Minister Rafael Ramirez indicated that PdVSA is reconsidering its involvement with the refinery, because Curacao allows U.S. military counter-drug flights to operate from its airstrips. “The Antillean government has not received any official communication related to these statements,” Bijleveld said.

Also, Bijleveld referred to a March 9, Isla Refinery management presentation concerning an estimated US \$1.5 billion investment that could turn the refinery into a modern plant within five years. Ramirez dismissed the media reports about PDVSA vowing to invest US \$1.5 billion to get the refinery into better working condition, saying it was speculation.

PDVSA began operating the Isla refinery in 1985 and has a lease that runs until 2019. (Various media)

Curacao – Dramatic Decline in Venezuelan Tourism Continues

The Curacao Tourism Bureau (CTB) reported a sharp 73% decline in Venezuelan tourism in January 2010 while stayovers from Venezuela dropped by 44% compared to the same month last year. The drop in tourism from Venezuela is attributed to Venezuelan government measures to curb dollar-tourism last year by limiting permits for charter flights and reducing the credit card limit.

Tourism in general declined by 13% and stayovers by 8%, according to the CTB.

The Dutch (+23%) and North American (+28%) markets augmented; stayovers from North America increased by 20%. The North American market increase was attributed to the re-introduction of a second daily flight from Miami.

Curacao experienced a 29% cruise tourism decrease; 52,000 cruise passengers visited the Island in January 2010. (Various media)

Antilles – Abundance of Media on All Netherlands Antilles Islands

Netherlands Antilles PM Emily de Jongh-Elhage announced in a speech for the Inter American Press Association that media is well represented on the five Netherlands Antilles islands (Curacao, Bonaire, Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Maarten).

Curacao has 32 radio stations, 4 TV stations, 11 daily newspapers and a weekly Spanish newspaper to cover a population of 150.000;

Bonaire has 10 radio stations, 1 TV station, 1 daily newspaper for a population of 13.000;

St. Maarten also has 10 radio stations, 1 TV station and 2 newspapers for a population of 40.000;

St. Eustatius has 1 radio station for their population of 3.000 and Saba also has 1 radio station for its 1.600 inhabitants.

Aruba – Parliament Opposes Ritz-Carlton Plan to Open New Hotel

Ritz-Carlton executives, together with Aruban PM Mike Eman, announced plans to open The Ritz-Carlton Aruba, last month. The previous MEP administration had signed a development contract with Ritz-Carlton, but AVP MP Juan David Yrausquin said that this faction is preparing a motion to halt the approval process. The AVP of PM Eman wants to preserve the proposed hotel location for other, environmentally friendlier, purposes. (Various media)

Statia - Saudis Quit Oil Storage Lease as China Steps In

Saudi Arabia Oil Company Aramco will reportedly quit a long-held lease for five million barrels of Caribbean oil storage in St. Eustatius near the key U.S. market on Thursday and Chinese-state giant PetroChina is poised to move in, industry sources said, a potential major shift in global oil trade dynamics.

Three sources familiar with Saudi operations at the terminal told Reuters that state oil company Saudi Aramco ended its arrangement to lease at the 13-million-barrel Statia Terminals on the island of St. Eustatius.

The five-million-barrel lease, regularly renewed by an Aramco subsidiary since 1995, formally ends on Dec. 31, one of the sources said.

"Aramco dropped out of storage recently, having discussed it for quite some time," a source familiar with Saudi Aramco's positions in the Caribbean said.

A source in China said PetroChina was negotiating to take the space, although it wasn't clear whether it would mainly store crude oil or residual fuel, which is actively traded in the region. A second source familiar with the terminal said a large, state-run enterprise was taking over the Aramco lease, but declined to identify the party.

"We have been running some fuel oil tanks there but want to expand," the Beijing-based PetroChina source said.

San Antonio-based NuStar Energy LP, which owns and operates the St. Eustatius terminal, declined to comment. Saudi Aramco did not respond to requests for comment. PetroChina officials in the United States also declined to comment.

NuStar's terminal on St. Eustatius is among the largest storage and shipping operations in the Caribbean.

China has shown growing interest in Latin America, particularly resources including crude oil, for the past decade as its economy and appetite for raw materials grew. It has signed oil deals with Venezuela and Ecuador.

And PetroChina is reportedly in talks on a bid for Valero Energy Corp.'s 235,000-bpd idled Aruba plant. (Various media)

Curacao – Isla Refinery Continues to Experience Issues; Startup Delayed

The PdVSA-operated Isla refinery continues experiencing technical problems which caused various disruptions over the past few weeks and a refinery shut down earlier this month. The BOO (Build, Own and Operate) plant - owned by Utility Company Aqualectra and Japanese Trading Company Marubini - that produces electricity, steam, desalinated water, and compressed air for the Isla Refinery and up to several megawatts for the national grid, is the cause of the incidents, Isla Refinery management said.

The BOO cannot start-up, because the rented compressors it hauled in from Jacksonville, FL will not arrive on the island before April 15, according to an Isla Refinery spokesperson. The entire repair and maintenance process could take up to five months. (Amigoe)

Antilles – Police Forces Unprepared for New Constitutional Structure

Various judicial experts in the Netherlands and Netherland Antilles are of the opinion that the Curaçao and St. Maarten police forces will not be ready to assume their new tasks by October 10, 2010, the date set for NA dissolution. Justice experts, invited by Dutch parliament for a hearing on Wednesday, were especially concerned about St. Maarten. The experts disagreed with the political decision to institute three separate police forces for Curaçao, St. Maarten, and for the BES islands. "The small scale operations will lead to great quality, quantity strength, flexibility, efficiency and integrity problems," one expert said. Some suggest the police organization should be regulated by a General Enactment of Kingdom Government (Algemene Maatregel van Rijksbestuur). New justice legislation will be discussed in Dutch parliament later this month and should guarantee proper maintenance of law and order by October 10, 2010, according to former Antilles PM Suzy Camelia-Romer. (Various media)

Antilles – Governor Goedgedrag to Travel to Suriname

The Governor of the Netherlands Antilles Frits Goedgedrag will be in Suriname from April 4-8, to attend a military jungle training exercise. Adèle P. van der Pluijm-Vrede will be acting during his absence. (Government Press Release)

ARUBA

Crime March 26 – 31

On March 28 a tourist in Oranjestad was beaten and robbed by a group of seven men. On March 30, three men attempted to rob a KFC restaurant in Santa Cruz, but fled without completing their robbery (Amigoe, Diario Aruba).

ST. MAARTEN

Crime March 26 – 31

On March 27, tourists were robbed of their vehicle in Mullet Bay by several men who had rammed their car with their own vehicle (Daily Herald).

Aruba head of police candidate for Chief of Police position

Current Aruba Chief of Police Peter de Witte is one of the candidates to become the new Chief of Police for St. Maarten. De Witte became head of Aruba's police department in November 2006. Another candidate for the position is St. Maarten deputy chief of police, Commissioner Richard Panneflek (24 Ora, Diario Aruba, Awe Mainta).

"The Weekly Press Summary is a compilation of stories running in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruban press that is intended to alert readers about items of interest to them. There is no interpretation or verification of the facts contained therein."